



## Honduras

### International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of 7 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population was mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), and 7 percent Amerindian; the rest were of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent.

There are no reliable government statistics on membership in churches. The Roman Catholic Church reports membership of slightly more than 80 percent of the population. In the most recent countrywide survey taken in 2002, the Le Vote Harris reports that 63 percent of respondents identify themselves as Catholics, 23 percent as evangelical Protestant Christians, and 14 percent as "other" or provide no answer. The principal religious groups are Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant churches. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represents the evangelical leadership. There are small numbers of Muslims and Jews. There are a mosque and a synagogue in San Pedro Sula and a synagogue in Tegucigalpa.

Missionaries are present.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. During the period covered by this report, the Catholic Church began developing plans with the armed forces to provide religious chaplains to the military. The Government consults with the Catholic Church and occasionally appoints Catholic leaders to quasi-official commissions on key subjects of mutual concern, such as anticorruption initiatives. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions, including the National Council of Anticorruption.

The Christian holy days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Although the Government does not require religious groups to register, those who receive "juridical personality" status are accorded tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty on imports. The Constitution grants the president the power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations. Associations are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the Evangelical Fraternity of Churches for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications also are referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president signs the approved resolutions granting juridical personality. There were no reports that the Ministry of Government and Justice rejected any such application submitted by a religious group during the period covered by this report.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The Ministry generally grants such permits.

Under article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the Government prohibits immigration of foreign missionaries who practice religions that claim to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud. During the period covered by this report, there were no complaints that the measure constituted a violation of freedom of religion.

There are religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as parochial schools. They receive no special treatment from the Government, nor do they face any restrictions.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In spring 2007 the Government denied entry to Jose Luis Miranda, who claimed to be the antichrist and has rallied against Catholic and evangelical churches. The Government declared that he presented a security risk. A small group of his supporters marched to protest the action without incident.

The Constitution stipulates that only lay people may seek election to the Congress.

The Catholic Church continued to seek the return of former properties of historic interest confiscated by the Government at independence in 1825; however, the Church has not submitted a formal request to the Government.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The Catholic Church designated the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the Archbishop established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section within his archdiocese.

There were few reports of discriminatory popular attitudes against persons of Arab descent, both first-generation immigrants and long-term residents. Most persons of Arab descent are Christian.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

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